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THE GREAT WHITE WALL

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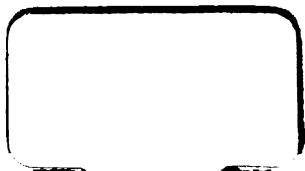
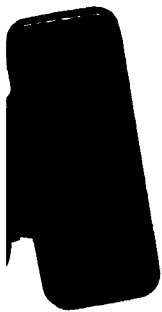


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THE GREAT WHITE WALL

THE GREAT WHITE WALL

A POEM

By
WILLIAM ROSE BENÉT

ILLUSTRATED BY DOUGLAS DUER



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TO
HENRY MARTYN HOYT, JR.



THE GREAT WHITE WALL

THE GREAT WHITE WALL

I

THE LION'S SOUL

*Along the purple mountain chains
The smouldering crimson sunset ran.
It seemed to chant of him who reigns
Beyond all reach of caravan. . .*

"Genghiz Khan lies in the Mountain Altai,
The wild red Mongol raider, Genghiz Khan!

"From the country of eternal dark
The great blue wolf of his fathers howls.
The Mountain Altai thrusts its stark
High buttress over the spreading cowl
Of obeisant shadows prone on the plain.
Passed is his violent crimson reign.
Genghiz Khan lies in the Mountain Altai.
Around his rock-hewn tomb the tiger prowls!

"Son of a stolen woman, born
By a river on a battle-night,
Ten thousand headmen heard his horn
Buffet the crags with echoes bright.
He scourged Al-addin and all Cathay,
And drank from Wang Khan's skull, they say,—

[1]



THE GREAT WHITE WALL

From Karakoram crouching sprang
To ravage the great walled land of Wang.

*"Genghis Khan lies in the Mountain Altai,
With his four strong sons whose names are swords
that clang!"*

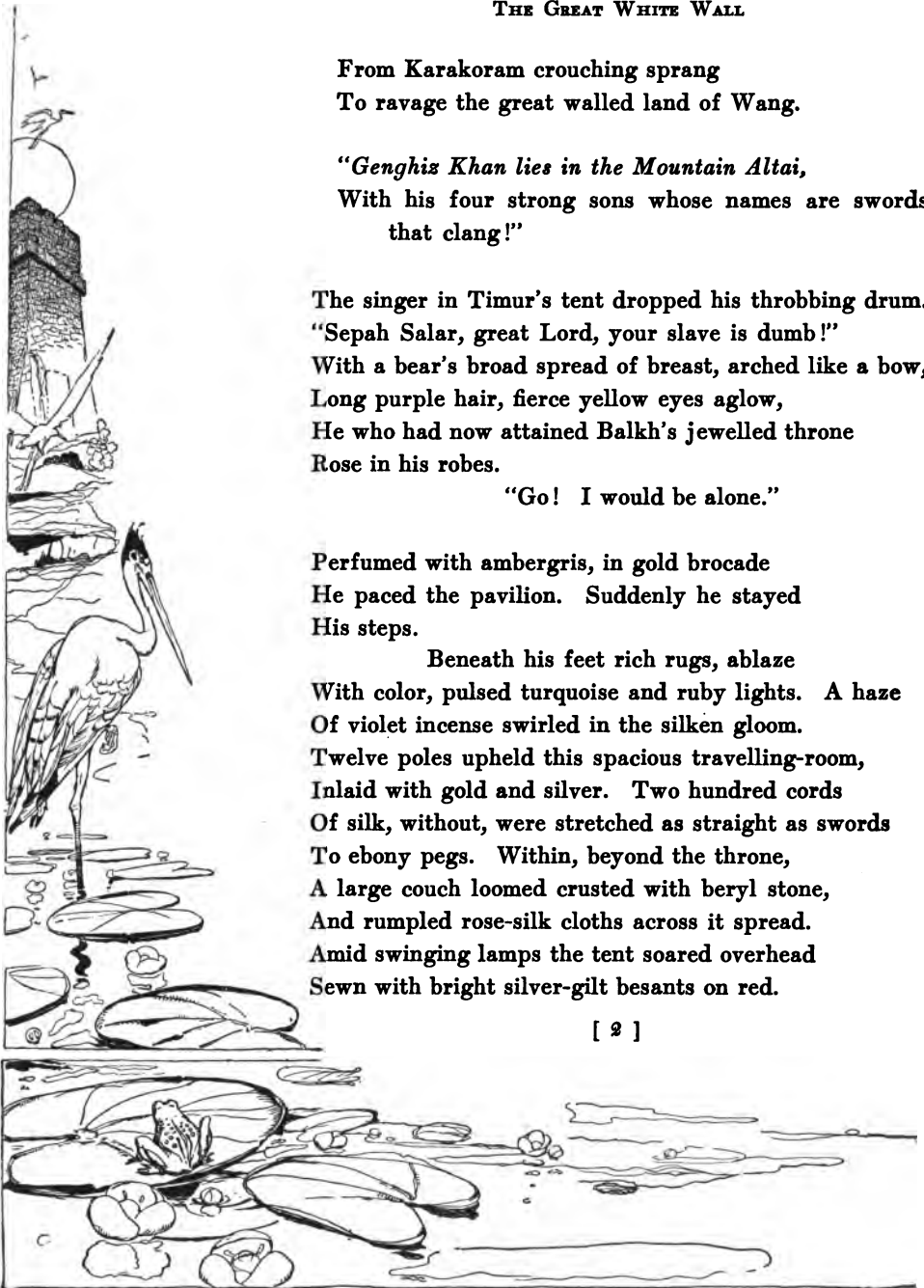
The singer in Timur's tent dropped his throbbing drum.
"Sepah Salar, great Lord, your slave is dumb!"
With a bear's broad spread of breast, arched like a bow,
Long purple hair, fierce yellow eyes aglow,
He who had now attained Balkh's jewelled throne
Rose in his robes.

"Go! I would be alone."

Perfumed with ambergris, in gold brocade
He paced the pavilion. Suddenly he stayed
His steps.

Beneath his feet rich rugs, ablaze
With color, pulsed turquoise and ruby lights. A haze
Of violet incense swirled in the silken gloom.
Twelve poles upheld this spacious travelling-room,
Inlaid with gold and silver. Two hundred cords
Of silk, without, were stretched as straight as swords
To ebony pegs. Within, beyond the throne,
A large couch loomed crusted with beryl stone,
And rumpled rose-silk cloths across it spread.
Amid swinging lamps the tent soared overhead
Sewn with bright silver-gilt besants on red.

[2]



THE GREAT WHITE WALL

And close outside could be heard a murmur of men,
The clatter of weapons, a camel's gurgle, again
The squeal and thump of an elephant, jangling voices
In various tongues—all a camp's unquiet noises.

Within, under pillared dragons with widespread wings,
Great Timur pondered the ebb and flow of things.

Then he clapped his hands. A slave, on swarthy knees,
Crawled in.

"Fetch the Lord Axalla, The Genovese!"

And lithe like a leopard the Chief resumed his stride
Till the tent-flap stirred again. Close at his side
Stood that earliest friend and Christian.

"Your pleasure, Lord!"

"Axalla, think you a Berlas can afford
To brook these rumors I hear about me now?
Doth Timur mean 'It trembles!'—the World? Then how
May I reconcile this news of the haughty imperious
Late trespasses of the Chinese?"

Gravely serious

Axalla pondered.

"Lord," (his voice was even)

" 'Tis the sundry kinds of folk 'neath the cope of Heaven
Do most truly give us Heaven to magnify.
(I but speak your own words!) For Heaven by diver-
sity

Is nourished most—and God is one in essence."
Quietly dignified in the shadowing presence,

[3]



THE GREAT WHITE WALL

He inclined his head a little, and waited mute
Green-sashed, of good poise in his Shiraz-silken suit.

"Nay, old friend, you mistake me—this is not Holy War.
Through the Indian land 'twas the Prophet I battled for.
But here I assure my estate, my mission rounds,
And—this King of China hath broken his ancient bounds.
He is puffed up with vainglory, this boasting one
Sends no more ambassadors, calls himself Child of the
Sun,

And behind the forty-league wall that Genghiz rent
Asunder as might a tiger the silk of a tent,
Behind his enheartening wall his garrisons
Laugh at mine uncle the Khan. . . I must act at once!"

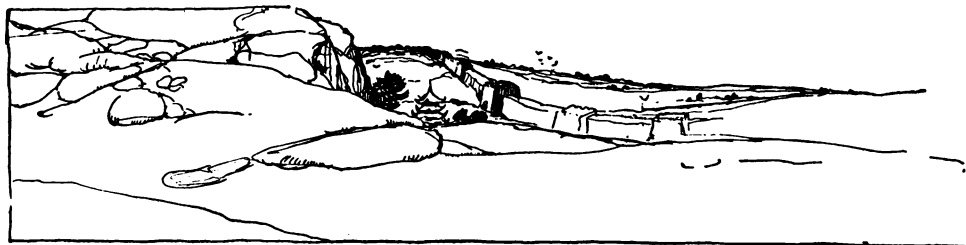
"Where hath he trespassed?"

"The Province of Leauton
Complains. The border provinces everyone
Have been raided—cattle and women and harvest
thieved!

Last night, two foot-posts running with lights achieved
The palace at Quinsai—a horseman relayed it to me
This nooning. Their girdles of bells rang mournfully,
He said, in the courtyard. Shrilly they began
Afar off shouting, "The viceroys beseech the Khan,
The provinces call to the Khan! They are caught in
mesh

And snared by China! Where is the Sun of Kesh
Who can deliver us? Succour, succour we pray!
And I cry, by our Tartar Earth-god, Natigay,
It shall not be!"

[4]



THE GREAT WHITE WALL

Axalla raised one slow hand.

"Nay—One God—above . . he is better to understand
Prayers! But these provinces I cannot trust.
They quarrel with themselves. They have a lust
For insurrection."

"Enough!" said Timur then.

"I have spoken, Axalla. Bid all my chiefs and men—
Yet stay! We shall feast, a sumptuous repast
Must be spread this night—for this is the very last
We spend by Quinsai. Tomorrow we march for the
South
To thrust his treacherous tail in the Dragon's mouth!

"Make ready the great camp-tables. I shall come forth
Tonight. The Khan, mine uncle, rides in from the north
Before the new moon has risen. He shares my plan."

Axalla bowed and withdrew. He knew this man
Through whom a poison of secret madness ran.
Ah, God nor devil could turn him once he would start,
And the King of China's dominions had fired his heart!

Axalla moved swiftly about the camp with orders.
For almost a mile on each side it stretched its borders,
With thousands of tents, herds of cattle and goats and
sheep,
Great wains and carts with their plunder burdened deep,
And legions of horsemen and footmen.

He quickly selected
A rabble of slaves. Full valiantly they erected

[5]



THE GREAT WHITE WALL

The state camp-table, only for Timur himself
When he deigned to dine with the others. On oven and
shelf

They ranged the banquet materials. Fires flared up
Along the plain. For now the heaven's blue cup,
Vast and inverted over their heads, was alight
With swarms of silver stars. Tall torches bright,
Sputtering bitumen, and thrust like spears in the ground
Spattered bloody flaughts through the shadows prowling
around.

With thought to sup, the camp's dull clamor increased.
And for full an hour the uproar of man and beast
Beat like a sea round the tent of Timur the Great.

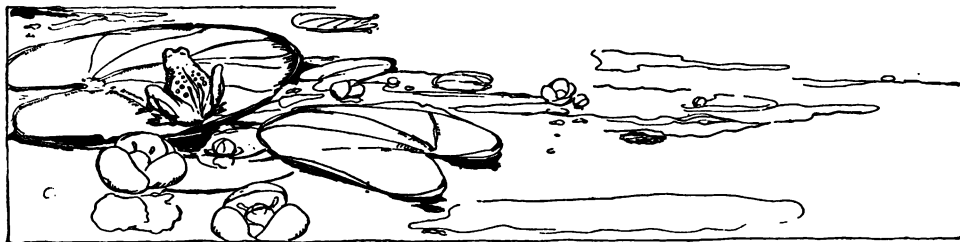
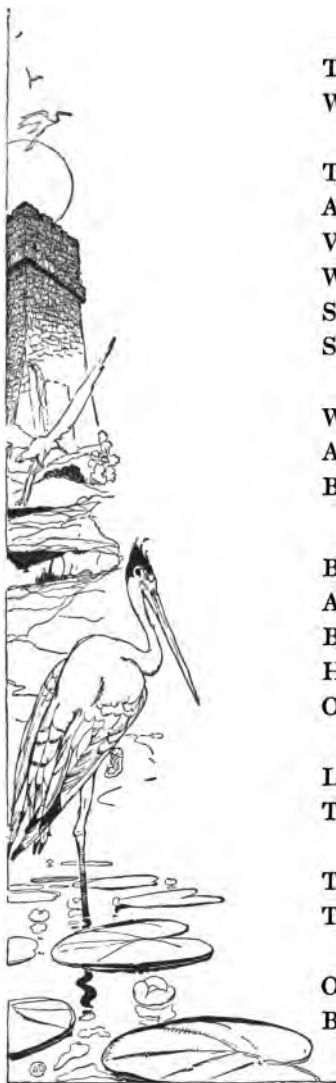
But within, the Chief had shrugged off affairs of state
And, wandering toward the back, had raised a certain
Brilliant, bird-embroidered, mysterious curtain.
He thrust forth his purple head with a cooing noise
On his lips.

And there answered him an indrawn voice
Like distant summer thunder, a rasping growl
That was nearer a purr.

As his head moved, cheek by jowl
To a lion's great black juba you saw it bending.
Then, erect, he drew back the curtain.

Catlike descending
On thick pads, the topaz-eyed Numidian beast
Blinked in the jewelled light. His content increased.

[6]



THE GREAT WHITE WALL

He turned to the throne. He leapt up on the golden
throne

And sat silent facing Timur.

The two were alone.

Then—this was enough to set the blood acrawl!—
Slowly the Conqueror bowed his head, to fall
On his knees before the lion, that took the mould
Of bronze, so quiet he sat.

“O Kublai, behold,
Ancestor, Khan whose palace at Kanbalu
Was the marvel of ten nations, whose hunting drew
The most famous leopards and falcons from far and
near,

Whose sorcerers wrought all miracles, whose gear
Surmounted all treasures, who kept aright
What Genghiz won, yet ruled in a higher light,—
Have I not overcome the Muscovite
And scourged the Jetes, made Persia tribute pay,
Brought India to the Prophet's light of day,
Defended mine uncle, thy grandson; kept the laws,
Respected faithfully the Syeds' cause,
Brought union unto Mavernalnaher
Despite all rebels,—plied the silver spur
Of Honor as I rode the horse of Day?
Lord of great Kubel's seed, whom Teragay
Called uncle,—thou who lit the lamps that be
The only kingly—Justice and Equity
That light the air-hung palace of Royalty,—

[7]



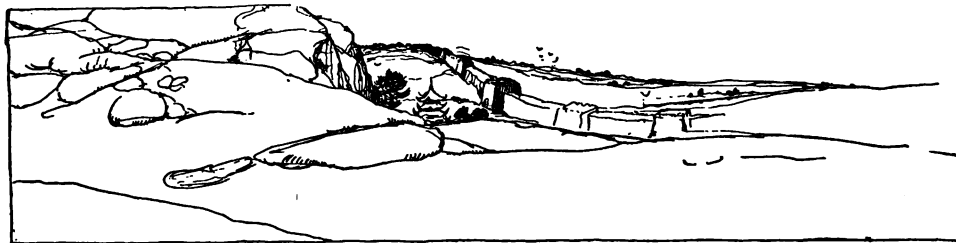
THE GREAT WHITE WALL

King in the shadow of God, of Noah's line,
Bestow thy grace on this design of mine!"

*Were it not death to pass the Chief's tent-door
At this hour of twilight, many had been struck sore
Amazed to see him grovelling on the floor
Clutching the three broad steps of the golden throne
Whereon a staring lion sat alone.*

The lion turned and shook its kingly head.
Then—from a white-fanged, dark red mouth, it said,
"Timur! No warning from the worse than dead
Could turn you from your pride. I see your tread
Smoke along lands where now life lies like light
Warmly and kind. I see the bitter blight
Of your black breath sow crimson conflagration
Through hills and valleys of many a peaceful nation. . .
Ah, with the new moon on Mount Altai risen,
Know you not Genghiz writhes from out the prison
Of the grave a blind white snake—that tigers there
Crawl from the rocks and ring him round, and scare
His filmed eyes, creeping in the blue moonlight
With lingering steps flexuous, left and right,—
Great cats with orange fur and ebony-black
Slashed stripes? And then with talons they attack
The poor pale reptile. Deftly with paw they strike,
Withdrawing—and again—and as they like
They play the poor snake rustling here and there
Over the cruel rocks. From lair to lair

[8]



THE GREAT WHITE WALL

They leap, noiseless, and bandy the tattered thing
That once was Genghiz—a Conqueror, and a King!
*But you have only heard your minstrels sing
Of his red triumphs, and how his death bereft!"*

The lion ceased. Its mournful face was cleft
By a weary yawn. It looked not Timur's way,
Swiftly leapt down, slunk to the curtain gay
And was gone behind it, where its cage of state
Adjoined the cage of Timur, called the Great.

II

THE CAMP BANQUET

*Timur with his chiefs was dining.
Proudly red were the torches shining.
Golden poniards, bright-dyed sashes,
Gleamed through the smoke and the torches' flashes!*

An envoy from the Old Mountain Man
Faced The Meteor of Khorassan.
Nasir Addeen, a Minister,
Leaned across the table to confer
With a Scythian captain. There sat chiefs
From Kashgar and Shadman, rinsing their beef's
Great haunch with a golden drink for darers
Poured them by hovering cup-bearers.
Calibes and Odmar, the heads of forces,
Talked with the Prince of Thanais—of horses.

[9]



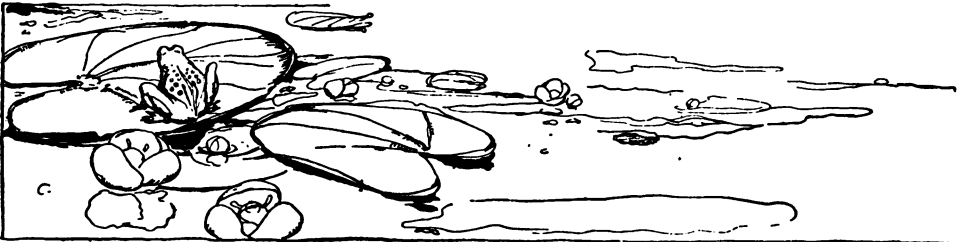
THE GREAT WHITE WALL

Ambassadors lied, each one a rogue,
From King Dor's to that of the Paleologue
Of Greece. But the envoy of King Dor,
Somewhat drunk, expounded his reasons for
His Damsel Court. They were quite immoral!
So (from far Thibet, where women hang coral
About dull idols' necks so stony,
In the Great Eight Kingdoms, and where huge bony
Dogs grow as big as young jack-asses,
And necromancers cause tempests in glasses)
Two legates began to bellow with laughter,
Drowning their mirth in their goblets after.

There were also prelates, hermits, and dervishes.
(The last eating most!) Black slaves, that serve
fishes,

Roast deer, camel's meat, melons or fruits,
Moved lithely in loin-cloths or silken suits.
White Cosmos was poured, the Tartar's mare's-milk,
And the goat's rather clabbered gift, who shares milk
Also with Man. There were amirs and sirdars,
Chiefs noted for various frightful murders,
Kazis and muftis, and many a man
From Syria and Hindustan.
In royal khalats some judges sat.
There were begums and moguls, and several fat
Syeds in sables and armalines
Worth quite two thousand sultanines;
And every jaw was gratefully crunching
Buffalo-chops, all teeth were munching

[10]



THE GREAT WHITE WALL

Cephalonian raisins, pomegranates from Ind,
Almond, citron, or tamarind.

And one Nestorian monk was still
Quivering with a curious thrill
As he told his tale of how he went flop
Headlong in the haunted Desert of Lop
When a great mysterious face appeared
On one mountain, and wagged a grisly beard
Above him, and all the spirits wailed "Whooh!"
Round him and round him, smoky and blue.
He was telling it in a vein quite merry
To a Sensin from Lapith's monastery
Where they all are austere and dress in yellow
And worship fire. Do you know, the fellow
Hadn't the slightest sense of humor.
He listened with rather hostile gloom—or,
More like, *spleen*. "*Was it worth repeating!*"
You could hear him think. . . He went on eating.

But beyond was—the Pole Star of Religion,
And he was splendid! As bald as a widgeon
And shimmering in his robes he sat
Asleep, with a cock to his marvellous hat
Made of paper prophecies. Fact enjoins
He had bound his own shawl around Timur's loins
And placed his own cap on the Conqueror's hair
(And this meant power over earth and air!)
Blessing the youth, not as yet to start his
Nice little forays and slaughter-parties. . .

[11]



THE GREAT WHITE WALL

And magicians and astrologers,
Seers and crystal-gazers and sorcerers,
All with conjuration or mumbled prayer
Or fireworks spitting sparks into the air,
With quadrant and square of prophecy
And astrolabe and divinity
And long gowns worked with a thousand wonders,
And voices lifted in practised thunders,
And divining rods like wavering tentacles
And others to trace the mystic pentacles,—
All such hovered about the fringes.

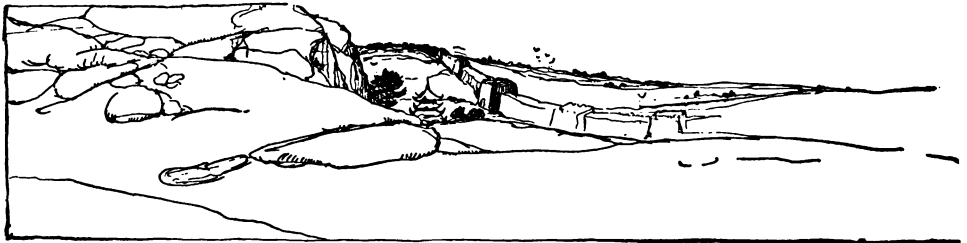
Then Timur suddenly gave them twinges
Of boredom by calling, if you please,
For "The Chant of Timur's Victories."
'Twas a fighting-song. Men not fain to gird heard
Its summons—and after—gladly murdered!

A song-man smote his horn harp to begin
While some slaves thrummed drums of crocodile-skin.

CHANT OF TERRIBLE TIMUR

The lofty mountain Kaf commands the world, and high
thereon there stands
The nest of burning Phœnix, clapping wings for jubilee
Of Timur, he whose luminous mind took up the Prophet's
power assigned
And tossed the infidel nations on the horns of Tartary!

[12]



THE GREAT WHITE WALL

Hear of great Timur! This is he, the loaded earth's
strong axle-tree.
Kingdoms like shattered potsherds hath he ground
beneath his heel.
The shadow of God falls on his way, the dazzling light,
the goodly ray.
The sun and moon before his gaze in dazed amazement
reel!

From Fars to Maveralnaher long since a great Astrologer
And Prophet came. His garments' skirts gleamed many
a magic sign.
Unto the Khan he straight foretold, from portents new
and scriptures old,
Rejeb the red auspicious star a light to rise and shine.

And in that light, whose blaze appears thirty and seven
hundred years
Since the Hegira holy, lo, a marvel should ensue:
The awful and tremendous birth of one to conquer all
the Earth,
The birth of terrible Timur that the waiting heavens
knew!

And Timur's parent, Teragay, falling in trance at close
of day
Perceived the luminous figure of some great Arabian
mage.
Toward that long-mourned Sepah Salar he held a naked
scimitar.

[13]



THE GREAT WHITE WALL

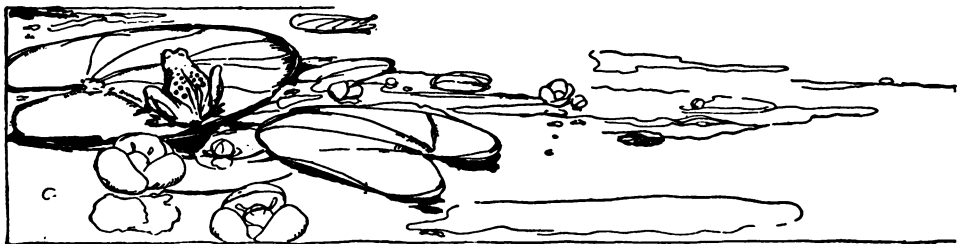
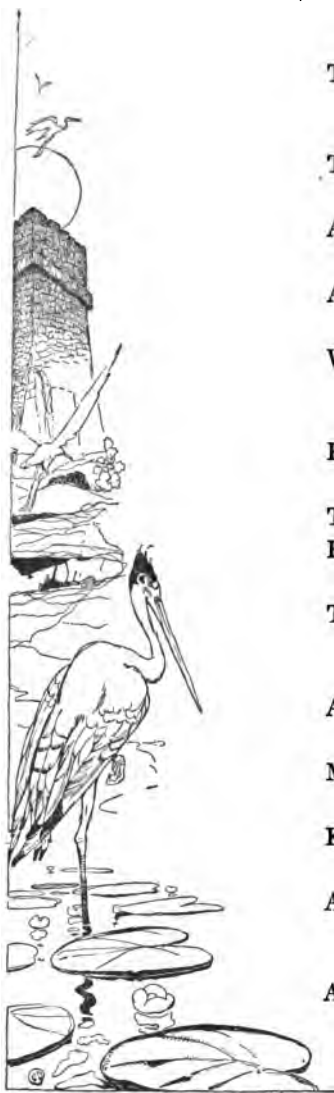
Teragay whirled and fenced with it, possessed of rapturous rage.

Then from that blade such sparkles danced as lit the heavens and shook entranced
A wild illuminate earth, and from the hand that held it rushed
A fountain-jet whose waters wide made green the world.
This signified
What but the birth of Timur, on whose day the world was hushed!

He stands Muhammed's minister, named from the Koran trulier
Than ever king; he holds upright the pillars of the law.
His lineage from the Moguls draws—though Kubel's seed he slew for cause
To cleanse the kingdoms. Rigorously he bends them to his awe.

Arabian Irac knew his spear in youth; and for the good Amyr
Melk Hussyn from the bleach-green on through Khorasan was borne.
Kutlug, the Amyr's son-in-law—dastard assassin—saw him draw
And rout the treacherous Seven on the Prince's hunting-morn.

And Timur Khan who overran the palace of the murdered Khan



THE GREAT WHITE WALL

Our Lord plucked writhing from the throne, thrust off his
treacherous friends,
And scourged the Jetes to howl and flee. Kings bound
their loins in fealty,
All city chiefs, all nomad tribes to Tartary's farthest
ends.

He razed the ramparts of Systan and smote the lords of
Badukhshan,
Whose chepaval and shekaval, wild squadrons, he out-
rode.
Polonians, barbarians, Udecelains, Hungarians
He gripped and threw, and on to new and vaster triumphs
strode.

His eyes were dilate lamps of light! The army of the
Muscovite
Bowed to his arm at Mascha as bows down a field of
grain.
Tribute they bring in buckets still: three hundred thou-
sand duckets.
Three leagues he chased them flying, like a cyclone on
the plain!

Where level Anatolia smiles his army stretched for fifteen
miles,
All that innumerable host shouting his name on high.
The bending heavens are his bow, the earth his levelled
shaft below.
He holds the Gates of Iron, and his campfires scorch the
sky.

[15]



THE GREAT WHITE WALL

And galliots come to Trebizond, and caravans from lands
beyond
Send gifts and gold to Timur, Thibeth, Cashmere, Tur-
kestan.
The hordes of Hussyn Sufy he shattered in wrath most
terribly.
Hitched to his household wain he drives the sun and
moon in span.

Khuariz subdued he; Balkh and Fars fell to his flashing
scimitars.
He razed the temples of Kukel o'er Indus as he came.
The Brahmans' images he broke. Delhi, Jahanpanah
were smoke
Behind him. All of Hindustan was fuel for his flame!

He crossed the Ganges for his vow to rip and rend the
Sacred Cow,
Then turned on Kyser Bayazed, and put the sword to
Rûm.
Huge janizaries rank on rank before his scything swords-
men sank.
And black Egyptian mamelukes shrieked as they met
their doom.

And now disastrous civil war crushed swiftly at the River
Brore
Restores him to his kingdom. On this night his glory
glows.

[16]



THE GREAT WHITE WALL

Imaus to Oxus shouts the song of Timur! Timur! Stars
prolong

The chant of Timur! Timur! and confusion to his foes!

The rocking, pounding rhythm of the pæan ceased.
Under the immense and turquoise vault of heaven
The great camp smouldered and seethed like a fire
quenched
With golden liquors.

All dark faces turned
Toward Timur at the end of the long state table.
He inclined his head.

When suddenly a guard
Stepped from crowding purple shadows into the torch-
light
And knelt, presenting his lance.

"O sovereign Lord,
Your uncle, the Khan, is arrived with his retinue
Direct from Quinsai. Yet, having ridden fast
And far, he will not join your feast tonight.
He waits you in your tent."

So Timur rose
And every voice fell silent as he spoke.

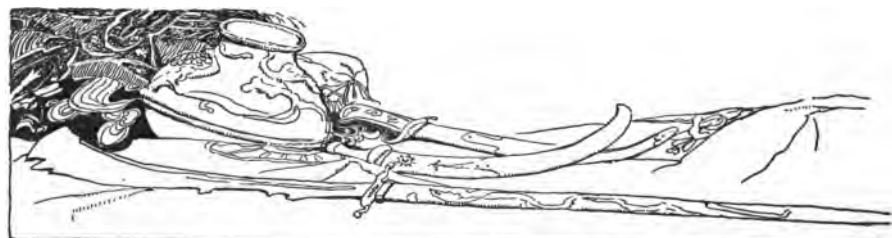
"My captains, and you others," were his words,
"We march tomorrow with our full fighting strength
For the Great Wall of China. This shall be
The crown of our achievement. I have borne
Too long the insolence of the Chinese King,
My mind and sword busied on other matters.
See to it, all ye who have my hosts in charge!"

[17]





*“See to it, all ye who have my
hosts in charge!”*



III

VISIONS ON THE MARCH

Sunlight shook on all the terrible shimmering shields of
Timur's armies

Marching to the Wall of China built by Chin the Only
First.

In brilliant colors flowed the clouds of Heaven that past
all guiling charm is

Staunch forever, blind in love, above a world in fury
nursed.

Ho! The saddle is Timur's bed, his standards wave to
music royal.

Persian and Arabian horses toss their trappings, prance
and fret.

Scimitars gleam inlaid with silver, wielded by his cap-
tains loyal.

Elephants bear his castled howdahs, solid gold with
rubies set.

Amyrs ride and sirdars ride and moguls ride on milky
horses—

Purple, green, and crimson silks and turbans wound and
tufted shoes

Enrich his rustling retinue. The captains of his tramp-
ing forces

Gleam in brass and silver, studded on lacquered leather.
And hues confuse

And clash and swim through golden clouds of dust about
four-poled pavilions

[19]



THE GREAT WHITE WALL

Full one hundred, floored with rugs of soft and glowing
Bokhara weaves.

Ho! The loud imperious drum of state shakes out for
all the millions

A deep-toned beat to time their feet. Thin soft tissues,
silken sleeves,

Ivory arms and half-veiled faces swim in a mist from
swaying litters.

Wild outriders toss their lances flashing against the set-
ting sun.

Pheasant feather and peacock plume from many a march-
ing headdress glitters.

Bows on backs, a crowd of archers bronzely swings along
as one.

Herds of antelope, goat, and nihlgao straggle along the
armies' fringes.

Mimicks, sorcerers, and buffoons in particolored costumes
pass.

Dancing girls with golden anklets trip in the desert dust
that sings.

High upheld above their bearers, banners stream from
poles of brass,

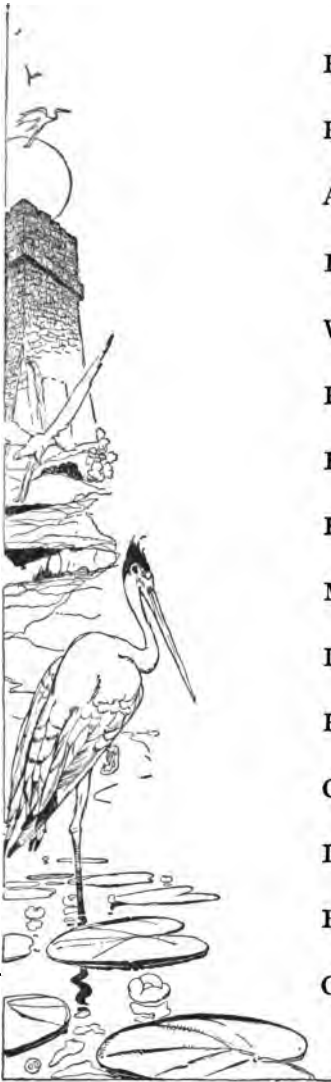
Over all the embroidered arms of Samarcand, The City
Splendid,

Lion and Sun and Three Great Circles, threefold realms
that signify,

Blaze on a banner of gold brocade.

And, densely by his troops attended,
Odmар, leading the Avant-guard, to a blare of terrible
horns goes by.

[20]



THE GREAT WHITE WALL

His captains ride on piebald barbs. Crescent scimitars
slash their sashes.

Fifty thousand javeliniers rock past with a unison that
thrills,

With light green marching loin-cloths bound—dark
limbs on which the sunset flashes.

Their front is spread like an open fan from the Eastern
to the Western hills!

Following these, the broad Battail, whose chiefs bestride
black stamping stallions;

Short-nosed men with blubber lips, drooped mustachios,
scalp-locks black.

Shaved heads gleaming, rank by rank they surge along
in huge battalions.

And sixteen squadrons of wheeling horse closely follow
upon their track.

And then, the shouting Arereward looms, its cavalcade
of captains swarming,

Caps and sashes of figured blue, saddles and housings
jewel-bright,—

By companies forty thousand foot behind the Prince of
Thanais forming!

And last—the Horse Adventurers, the Hope Forlorn.

And now the night
Creeps down as laden camels pass with melons and
grapes and dates all corded;

The flocks of bleating black-faced sheep—the lumbering
elephants once more—

[21]



THE GREAT WHITE WALL

While hundreds of yoke of oxen draw the great wheeled
houses, closely hoarded,
Covered with black or mottled felts—weird paintings
splashed on every door;
And chests of wickers on other carts, with birds and
beasts ensrolled for laughter;
The special tents of Timur's wives, their eunuchs strid-
ing grim and tall;
White tents for peace, and red for war, and black for
mourning following after.

*Thus passed proud Timur's vast array that thundered
down on the Great White Wall!*

Over the bronze and rugged Western hills
The broad sun sank, a despot past his reign;
And, with the evening air that cools and thrills,
Great purple shadows crept across the plain.

The glitter and murmur of that marching host,
Whip-crack and rasped command and trumpet-call,
Animal ululations,—all was lost
As an absorbing silence swallowed all.

The sun's death burnished metal here and there
To glance with light unknown to conquest's heat:
A light like courage battling through despair,
The sign of some victorious defeat.

[22]



THE GREAT WHITE WALL

From East and West the mountains leaned, and cast
Abroad the spreading cold. Out of the rare
Ether of summits it settled down at last
Through that pure flowing gold that was the air.

On neck and shoulder every man who dreamed
Felt the anointing. Then the first files leapt
A foaming torrent. And now the whole host streamed
Through a great gorge, wherein the waters wept.

The high rock walls reechoed. But, pushing through,
"Halt!" rang the curt command from lip to lip.
For there the armies trembled at a view
Had won the Devil to apostleship.

And high on Timur's tall white elephant
The soft gold curtains of the howdah shake.
They part. The tyrant's eyes, now suppliant,
Stare like a seventh sleeper's roused awake.

So still—ah, God, so still! For far before
And far below their cliff, where veered the road,
Dim orange plains flowed like an open moor
To where, against the sky, the Great Wall showed.

Along a mountainous horizon low
Like a coiled frosty dragon-snake it curled
Conforming to the summits' ebb and flow
And stretching to the ends of all the world.

[23]



THE GREAT WHITE WALL

Almost that mile-high mountain seemed to lift,
Sacred Pe-cha, beyond it,—for so clear
The cold was, that it set their minds adrift
On dawns in some far richer atmosphere.

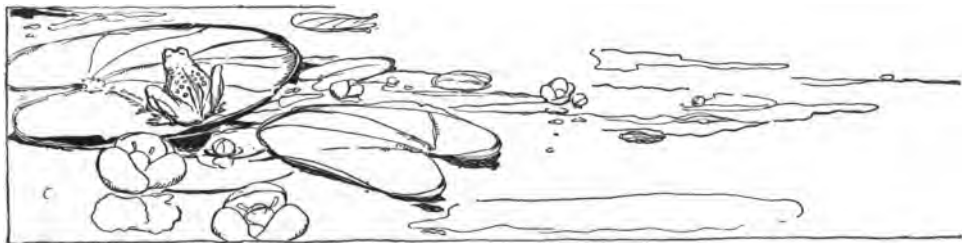
A vast mysterious land,—its borders clung
With gorgeous fable! There silver maidens sang,
And, from the haunted forests of Shantung,
Crawled forth the emerald Dragon King, Lung Wang.

From Pih-chih-lee's wide gulf to the dark gorge
Of the dragons' gate—a perilous Paradise,
Where grinning devils spat flame like a forge
And fox-wives wooed lost men with treacherous eyes!

Yes, there the oily Yellow River wound
By bamboo palaces and tortoise isles;
Enchanters fought with tigers underground
And trees grew snow for miles on orchard miles.

And where the far Five Sacred Mountains rose,—
Rotund and almond-eyed, his slightest nod
Opening a fiery earthquake on his foes—
There sate in state the Jade Imperial God!

So through the dusk that softly came to shroud,
They gazed and marvelled at the Great White Wall;
Grandees and horsemen huddled in a crowd,
The elephants' breathing pulsing over all.



THE GREAT WHITE WALL

By gorge and crag it seemed to crawl accursed,
Coiled back to watch them with a lingering eye:
That fitting triumph of the Only First
Whose wordless tablet crumbles on Mount Tai!

With a deep sigh the Prince let fall the silk;
Then, turning to a slave-girl white as milk
Who crouched among the scented cushions piled
Within the howdah, he murmured—strangely mild—
“Sing, slave, sing of my dreams, and soothe my spirit!”

In the swaying gloom, so soft he scarce could hear it,
Her voice began—her lute-strings faintly ringing
To the climbing, lulling cadence of her singing:

SONG OF TIMUR'S DREAMS

Visions and dreams from the horn-gate and ivory gate
Through the fastnesses flowing with sleep,
Symbol and sign of a Line ancient, gorgeous and great,
Planets auspicious and horoscopes, early and late
Timur plucked forth from the Deep.

Lo, he dreamed him a dream!

*Out of deep sleep flowed the real on the senses that
seem!*

The Prophet swam first on his eyes, He on whom be the
grace
Of God,—who divided the moon,

[25]



THE GREAT WHITE WALL

By which miracle shown, He alone has looked full on
the face

Of the Highest! The One and True Prophet, he pleads
to our race.

In our souls are we his, late or soon.

*Aye, from depths of a dream
Out of deep sleep loomed that Form that the heathen
blaspheme!*

"Because of thy noble compassion for Mine," said the
Voice,

"For my Syeds thou shepherdest well,
Seventy seed of thy line shall arise to rejoice,
Earth in their ears shall resound with an excellent
noise!"

Softly the syllables fell.

*From the gleam of a dream
Out of deep sleep comfort streamed on the senses that
seem.*

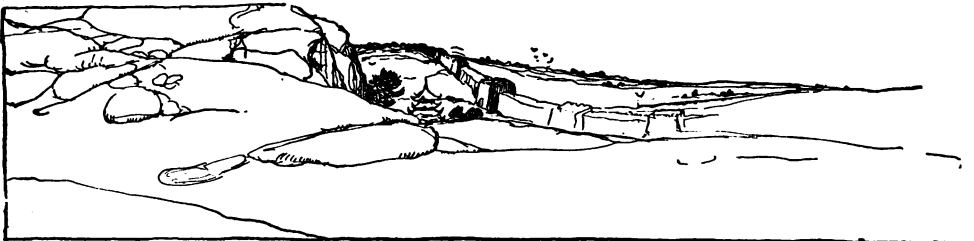
And next there appeared a great net that was cast in
the sea

And withdrawn, and laid wide on the sand.

Crocodiles, shining large fish, in its mesh seemed to be,
Each golden-gear'd, with a crown, with a crown and a
key!

Flashing they shimmered to land.

*Great tench, carp, and bream
Symbolled the cities and lands Timur's sword should
redeem!*



THE GREAT WHITE WALL

Ere the battle with Tucktumush Khan, lo, he saw the
sun rise

In the East, but sink back to the East!

And before Hindustan he perceived, as it seemed to his
eyes,

Nests beset with fierce birds, whence he drove them with
slings and with cries:

So his victories waxed and increased!

Victories vain in a dream? . .

Nay! Timur rouses. Be faithful, my lute, to thy theme!

Camping toward Syria, high on a mountain he stood

In sleep. Clouds of dust black and white

(The armies of Egypt and Syria) strongly pursued

Till rain like straight steel made the plain hiss and
boil . . and his mood

Laughed aloud in victorious light.

O'er the war of a dream

Timur was loosed like the heavenly torrents that stream!

He saw a vast shade-tree whose branches spread over
the skies,

Whence in various shower there fell

Rich colored fruits—and great cattle with cavernous
eyes,

Reptiles and birds, all with claws and with clamorous
cries,

Rushed to feast on the strange miracle.

The tree, it would seem,

*Was the Tree of his House—with the future defaming
his dream!*

[27]





“Princess Yin”



THE GREAT WHITE WALL

Falcons, and Lions, and Swords, and rich Flagons of
Wine

Timur dreamed. Sleep disclosed to his reign
A Desert—a Garden—each spread for the symbol and
sign

Of his actions of evil or good: all the gems of the mine,
All the carcasses strewn on the plain!

In a dream . . in a dream . .

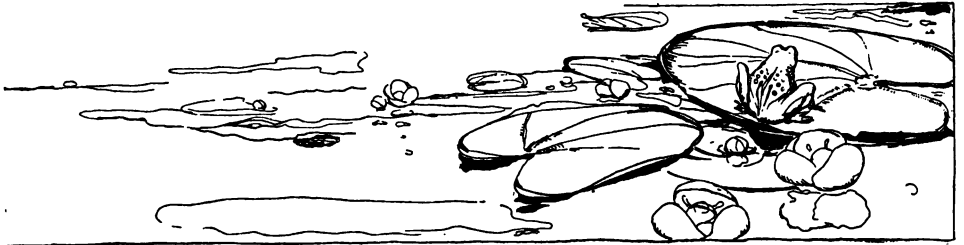
*Softly! He sleeps. . . Ah, if only the real could but
seem!*

Yes, the Prince slept. The howdah rocked and swung.
The golden curtains stirred. The slave-girl curled
Her ivory limbs, swathed in their gauzy silks,
And rested chin on hand. Kohl-painted lids
Drooped over desolate, passionate violet eyes.
Thin swirls of incense, from a few pastilles
In a white jade bason, fluttered across the shadows.
The Prince slept. And, at first, 'twas deep and blank
Untraced by any finger of fantasy,—
Utter unconsciousness. But at the last
After an hour or near, a dim light dawned
Upon his somnolent senses.

As if veil
Over half-transparent filmy veil withdrew
To faintest music, gradually he saw
A landscape shimmer before him, vivid and clear.

Cherry and plum tree with white and rosy blooms
Sprinkled a faint green hillside where it rose

[29]



THE GREAT WHITE WALL

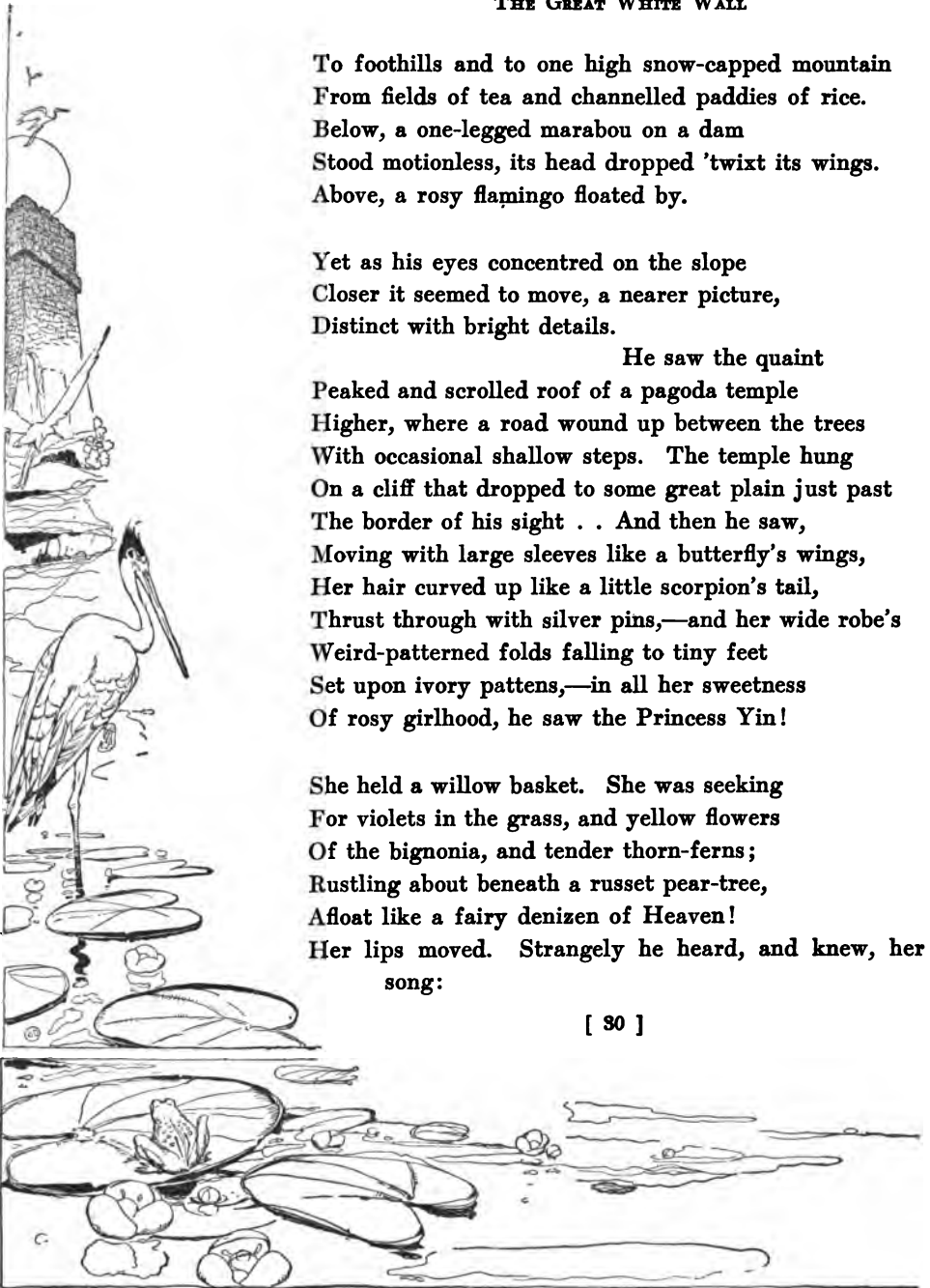
To foothills and to one high snow-capped mountain
From fields of tea and channelled paddies of rice.
Below, a one-legged marabou on a dam
Stood motionless, its head dropped 'twixt its wings.
Above, a rosy flamingo floated by.

Yet as his eyes concentrated on the slope
Closer it seemed to move, a nearer picture,
Distinct with bright details.

He saw the quaint
Peaked and scrolled roof of a pagoda temple
Higher, where a road wound up between the trees
With occasional shallow steps. The temple hung
On a cliff that dropped to some great plain just past
The border of his sight . . . And then he saw,
Moving with large sleeves like a butterfly's wings,
Her hair curved up like a little scorpion's tail,
Thrust through with silver pins,—and her wide robe's
Weird-patterned folds falling to tiny feet
Set upon ivory pattens,—in all her sweetness
Of rosy girlhood, he saw the Princess Yin!

She held a willow basket. She was seeking
For violets in the grass, and yellow flowers
Of the bignonia, and tender thorn-ferns;
Rustling about beneath a russet pear-tree,
Afloat like a fairy denizen of Heaven!
Her lips moved. Strangely he heard, and knew, her
song:

[30]



THE GREAT WHITE WALL

"I am so happy!

Ah, mulberry tree, pretty friend, how happy am I!

O willows, willows, weep not! O butterfly

In your brilliant brocade, what wonder you flutter and
fly

Dizzily twirling into the beautiful sky!

"I am so happy!

Winter is always rain, and foresters binding

Their firewood faggots,—and winds that are cruel and
blinding;

But the Spring brings his porcelain whistle and bamboo
flute

And sits making merry music where all the grasses were
mute.

Yes, even the blind musicians, I hear them tinkling now
At their ritual music-frames in the temple of Chow!

"In my father's shooting park the soft-nosed deer

Are all afrolic. Fuzzy horns—so funny!—

As soft as velvet have just begun to appear

On the little ones' heads. . . I shall hang paper money

On the mulberry tree, and strew many colored beans

Around its roots—and then—will you tell me what it
means,

Most Honorable Sir Mulberry? Will you tell me why
I am so happy today? *Oh so happy, so happy am I!*

"The Filial doves are cooing very sweetly

All through the oaks. And, at night, the Rabbit-Net

Is such a jewelled constellation set

[31]



THE GREAT WHITE WALL

Beyond my window, its beauty beguiles me completely
When the egrets are flying across the cloudy moon.
Oh soon he will come! I am sure he will come soon,
My excellent Prince, on a pony silver-shod,
With sun-patterns on his sleeves and the sash of a
mountain-god. . .

And I shall show him—why, I shall show him *you*,
You funny little yellow duck, with *such* a waddle
Around our straw-stack—your flat red bill and your
nodding green-tufted noddle!

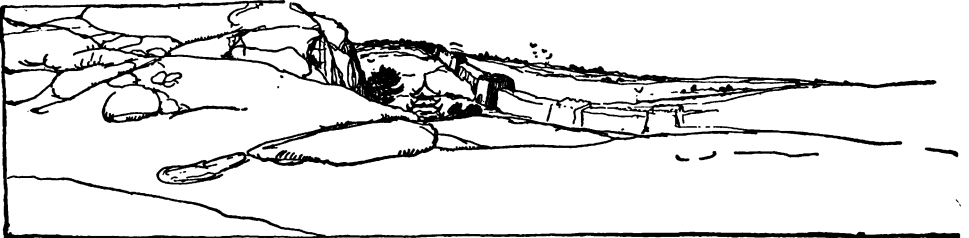
“And I shall show him the stack-yard greenbeaks peck-
ing,

And we will sit at a table of split bamboo
And eat lychee-nuts and ginger, and drink pink tea,—
And feed the deer in the park wild celery,
And count the carp. And he will say to me,
‘You are my little barbel taken in a wicker net
And your eyes are like the dew on the violet,
And your hands are like white sea-shells on the beach!’
Oh how very happy we’ll be, oh how very happy we’ll be,
My lordly Lover! . . . That will be pleasant speech!

“So, see, you old black-lipped sheep, cropping on with
never a stop,

See! I shall drop
These acorns and these sow-thistles into this pool
So soft and green and cool,
For a charm! . . . And I shall try
All this month to embroider so faithfully and well
And excellently obey the little bell

[32]



THE GREAT WHITE WALL

That the Prince will just have to ride his pattering pony
out of the sky.
For oh so happy—oh so happy—oh so happy am I
That I wish to cry!"

The vision wavered and broke to dancing colors
As the Princess ceased her carol. Plunged in darkness,
The roots of Timur's heart seemed to wrench and tear
With a dreadful anguish mingled of joy and pain.
A burning hunger dragged claws across his breast.
A mysteriously sweet radiance filled his mind
With the licking flames of countless brilliant candles.
He stretched his thick-sinewed arms, and deep in his
throat
Rumbled a hoarse and incoherent cry.
He strained toward the vanished dream.

And his opening eyes
Looked into other stars of frightened violet,
Far other! For through a shaking mist of incense
His crouched white slave-girl eyed him across the rugs.
Under them jolted and rocked the burly back
Of his tramping elephant. Through fluttering silks
He heard the rumbling rhythm of his marching host,
Mixed with sharp cries and sudden scourging horns.

But among the poled pavilions surging down
The mountain road, a shrouded iron cage
Swayed underneath that lion with Kublai's soul.
In misery of the journey, the tawny beast
Lay huddled in one far corner.

[33]



THE GREAT WHITE WALL

What lit his eyes

Suddenly now, as he raised his head to listen?
Some ghost of a groan from his master's leading howdah? . .

His gaze took a brooding human thoughtfulness.

IV

THE OUTER WALL

They pitched their camp before the Great White Wall
In milky moonlight. Every noise was hushed.
Far stretched the picket lines. The tents rose tall.
Within his own, great Timur, fever-flushed,
Paced the thick carpet. To his breast was crusht
A young fresh phantom, a being clothed in Spring,
Yet all—illusion? . . Then swift utterance rushed
On his ears—he roused—and saw Axalla fling
The tent-flap wide, and usher in a Mandarin like a King.

With them came Odmar. . . Ah! He remembered now.
This Mandarin was the Lord of Vauchéfou.
The three made swift obeisance. Timur's brow
Cleared with his thought. *The night set work to do.*
Short was that audience, but the talk once through
Certain success dazzled in Timur's eyes.
This Chinese renegade had sworn he knew
The Wall's one hidden flaw. And then the prize
Was in their grasp, their entry won to China's sick
surprise.

[34]



THE GREAT WHITE WALL

"For," said the Lord, "dim lies the Lake Hogeon
A short march distant. Only stars can frown
Through its thick border undergrowth, the screen
To a dark tunnel. And many a flaming town
Shall curse the stones that year by year slipped down
Into that lake that yonder saps the Wall.
I can supply the raftage, lest you drown.
You shall slide through as slithering lizards crawl.
And then—revenge! Revenge!" he spat with seething
gall.

"I was a Prince too faithful to my Chief.
I rose in rank and station. And my foes
Plotted against me. Ah, beyond belief
Their treachery, that only my stabbed heart knows!
Cast off—proscribed! And more enormous grows
My wrong with every year. I lurk at bay,
An exile of wild horsemen. As I rose
I fell. My castle crumbles to decay.
The Crown divides my lands and all my rich array!"

And so, that midnight (twelve days since they left
The camp near Quinsai) saw a force embark
And silently glide through the deep lake's low cleft
Under the walls. The dense and starless dark
Noted not silver ripple or twinkling spark,
And far above, the great wall's dim patrol
Stared with no hope through high swamp reeds to mark
The steady rafts draw inward to their goal.
The first bore Vauchéfou, and Timur's savage soul.

[35]



THE GREAT WHITE WALL

His captains urged and argued him to stay
Lest the scheme prove a trap. He shook them off.
Yet as Axalla softly cried, "Give way!"
Close by the raft's side came a growling cough.
The lion's head reared swimming. By the scruff
Strong Timur heaved him up, stilled the dismay,
Bade "On!" and stroked the wet mane with a rough
Wild tenderness. And rafts as still as they
Followed their phantom track on this most weird foray.

Gray dawn lay still in limbo when the troops
Crawled through dense willow thickets at last, and
threw
Their mantles round them, whispering in groups.
Within the wall the Lord of Vauchéfou
Straightway toward a strategic hillside drew
The muffled host. Dark to the moon's dim lamp
There soared one fortress. But when the red sun slew
The dragon night, their unsuspected camp
At Odmar's signal from without would rush the un-
guarded ramp.

Timur, his hand smoothing the sparse harsh fur
Of the shaggy lion, sate among his spears
And heard the voice of an astrologer
Deciphering some soldier's dreams or fears.
The muttered words were grateful to his ears.
He summoned him straightway. "Show my fate!" he
croaked
Hoarsely. The Conqueror's eyes searched in the seer's

[36]



THE GREAT WHITE WALL

Who raised a crystal sphere, and, blackly cloaked,
Knelt and with fluttering hands its potent ghosts in-
voked.

He proffered it to Timur. Closely peering
The Chief stared through it. But the lion rose
With bristling juba. Worse than death his fearing
Of what those dim transparencies disclose,
For now the glimmering ball floats with a rose
Light, now with green, and then through swirling
 swarms

Of sparks a cameo picture grows and grows
To vivid life, a breathless portrait forms!
The Chief's eyes blazed. The beast's growl rasped like
 some far thunderstorm's.

About a courtyard of ovens
Chattering maids made clatter.
A superb and portly person,
Stiff rustling in robes, directed
Their haste. On trays and salvers
Smoking foods were borne,
Roast turtle, minced carp, and bowls
Of steaming birds-nest soup.

About the cobbled courtyard
Crowded the bamboo palace
With many a peaky tower
Red and green and painted
With weird fantastical patterns,
Bestuck with grinning monsters.

[37]



But down in the midst of the courtyard,
Fluttering with excitement,
Vibrated the fairylike figure
Of the dainty Princess Yin.
A face of yellow blush-rose
She turned, and pirouetted,
Winning her nurse's frown,
And instantly, staid and solemn,
Took in careful hands the tray
Of the purifying libations
And entered a door of the palace.

*The crystal globe was clouded
And then again glowed bright.*

Around small bamboo tables
Gorgeous generals, marquises,
Mandarins and officers
Sat at a farewell feast.
The gems on their scabbards gleamed,
And crimson lacquer and black
Glittered with gold inlay.

Then a chief arose and lifted
One of the sacred bows,
Unbound its wrapped green silk,
And bent it—'mid acclamation
From all, who stood up straightway
And bowed to a ritual rhyme.

[38]



THE GREAT WHITE WALL

Then all raised cups of jade
And made a mute libation
Of the wine the Princess proffered;
For among those splendid costumes
Like a fluttering bloom from the plum tree
Tiptoed the Princess Yin.

And then a glistening figure
Arose, and bowed, and sang
(Through a magic Timur heard it!)

THE SONG OF THE GREAT WHITE WALL

"From the Eastern Sea to Shensi, the Only First
Ruled. He had thousands of headmen at his behest;
But all the scholars called him accurst, accurst,
Of wolf voice, tiger heart, and pigeon breast!
He burned all the cautious classics, and long ago
Buried such scholars that melons took root to grow
Above their bodies in winter! Each mandarin
Quaked at the will of Chin Shik Huang Ti Chin!

"Yet he raised a wall, a wall—from the Yellow Sea
To the ramparts of rough Thibet. And every mile
Stand white pagodas built of the bravery
Of the bones of its proud defenders. No man of guile
Was Chin, but a forthright builder and leader of men.
Yet one, in our time, has come like his son again.
The King, my friends! Let your warrior voices ring!

[39]



THE GREAT WHITE WALL

Bow to the East and bow to the West—the King!
Bow to the North and bow to the South—the King!"

And again the crystal clouded.

Now, on a wide white road,
Were seen the revolving wheels
Of the bright war-carriages
Of sandalwood. Within them
Behind chequered bamboo screens,
With embroidered red knee-covers
And helms of vermillion tassels
And gold and velvet slippers,
The bowing Peers went by.

Officers of the army,
With leopard-skin cuffs, and collars
Of scarlet adorned with fox-fur,
Whirled behind pure white steeds
Black-maned, and piebald ponies
Guided by six silk reins,
With golden breast-bands glancing.

Jinglers and drummers passed,
The drums of lizard-skin leaping;
Archers with ivory bows
And bowstring-thimble and armlet
Of ivory; and footmen
With colored lacquer cuisses
And lances with scarlet streamers.

[40]



THE GREAT WHITE WALL

And then the blowing flags
With blazonry of birds;
The tortoise and serpent banners
With oxtails over all
Streaming forth in a wind from the North
A violent wind.

"The drums beat—the drums
Beat—and the Great White Wall
Is a whetstone for sharpening swords!"
He heard the cry go by.
"The orders are black on the tablets.
The drums are calling,—the drums!"

But he saw at the gate of a garden,
Uplifted by armed men,
The form of the Princess Yin
Stretching her hands to the host.
She wept, "The Filial doves
Have flown—but the drums are calling.
The maces of white jade
Dance with the great red bows,
And the torches smoke in the courtyard
And the princely men go forth!"

Timur reeled back, his hands before his eyes.
"Aye, they are well prepared. They do not wait.
Yet shall our sudden and shattering surprise
Strow them like leaves from gate to guarded gate.
The hour approaches—the hour that is too late!
And—ah, her face, her face! She waits me there

[41]



THE GREAT WHITE WALL

When I sweep on her like a wind of Fate!"
He rose and stretched his arms—and met the glare
Full in his own of questioning orbs, the great lion's
steady stare!

V

THE INNER WALL

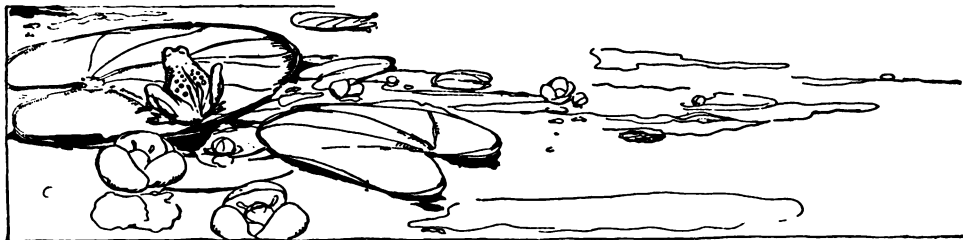
"The birds cry out 'Ying! ying!'"
Said the Princess wandering
On the flowery temple hillside.
"Birds, why do you sing?"

"Why do you call my name?
This day remains the same.
The cranes in the marshes crying
Answer my cry of flame.

"By reeds and tortoiseshell
Can one divine it well,
This sorrow that eats the heart out,
This croak of a broken bell?"

"The bushy medlars blow
And the cherries are pink with snow
And Kiang and Han and Ho
On their sacred courses flow
With yellow-jaws and sand-blowers
Winnowing to and fro.

[42]



THE GREAT WHITE WALL

"But I am sick with dread
And dust is on my head,
For the great red bows are bended
And the han-pa wait for the dead!

"*Hao mo?*—are you well?
Climbing people, answer and tell
If you know how sways the battle,
How the mandarins fought or fell!

"Burning perfumes on a tomb,
Fluttering papers in the gloom,
Sepulchres closed within the mountain,—
The white and empty room!

"Courtiers, passing, why are ye
White-faced, hurrying. Can it be
That the tide has turned against us?
Is there then some treachery?

"Take the white silk—draw it tight,
Recreants, flying from the fight!
So die strangling! For my father
Comes a hero home tonight!"

Thus, half madly, wandering,
Hear the little Princess sing
On the flowery templed hillside,
While the bright birds call "*Ying! ying!*"



THE GREAT WHITE WALL

So she climbed higher in the early morning
While hurrying figures streamed along the slope
On the temple road. They passed and passed for hours
It seemed. Silent and ashen-faced they passed
In brown or gray robes fluttering, shuffling through
The mounting dust.

And then at last she saw
Two riders threading bridges through the rice-fields
Below. She climbed to the temple and wandered out
On its wide rampart high above the plains.
Far off it seemed she could see faint waving banners
On the Wall—but all was very, very far.
She viewed the riders from this higher coign
Till finally they gained the road below
And slowly, painfully began to climb.
A strong foreboding laid hands upon her heart.
Again she wandered out, drawn down the road.
At last she saw the ponies' nodding necks
Their spatter of muck and mire as high as the crupper,
Their patient faces streaked with darker sweat,
Their black lips tossing foam. The riders too
Were splashed over all their lacquer. Bareheaded both
They rode, with naked scimitars at their sides,
One broken and one stained.

"Knights . ." she began.
"The golden luck dishes of the thousand li
Are lost!" coughed one. "By great Chin's chameleon
dog
Never have I seen such fighting! This Timur
Is far more monster than the Double Double!"

[44]



THE GREAT WHITE WALL

Horses and furniture and arms are lost.
He has brought great artilleries and rams
And slings that heave huge stones. But have you heard
The worst: it was that execrable Lord
The Outcast let them in!"

"That let them in?"

That let them in?"

"Verily! Overnight

*He sent them through an old breach in the Wall
On rafts!"*

The sunlight reeled around the Princess.

"And the King's cousin is taken," the man went on.

"Slaughter bestrides the plain of Paguinfou.

A squadron of the Tartars following us

Press close. The Parthians in escalade

Have beaten old Prince Li, and he is slain."

"What—what Prince Li?"

"Why, the old General, the Good Councillor.

Lady, you faint . . here!"

"No!" the Princess said

Gathering herself erect. "But you? Deserters?"

"We ride on a desperate mission to warn the towns

And the battalions of the cantons. Come!

You are not safe here. Why, in half an hour

The barbarians will be splashing through the rice.

Up on my crupper!"

And then the man who spoke

She saw was but a boy. Through all the mud

And blood that stained his face, his white teeth flashed

[45]



THE GREAT WHITE WALL

In a beguiling grin—that instantly changed.
His teeth clicked shut. He clutched his saddle-bow.
“You are wounded?”

“No!” he gasped. “Nothing! But you
Must come with us!”

She shook her little head.
And lied. “I—I—am waiting for—*my father!*”
And turned and ran in her pattens toward the temple.

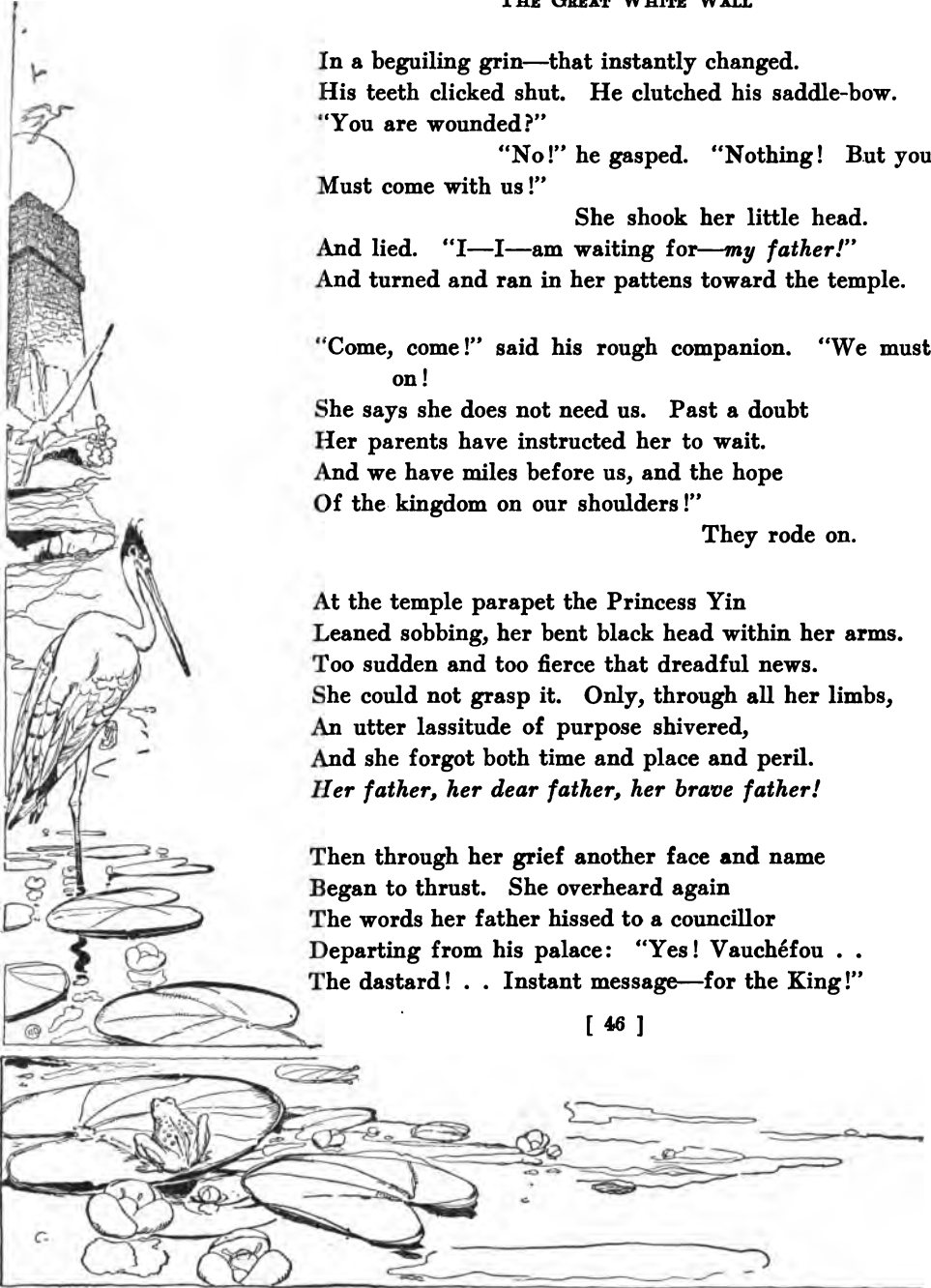
“Come, come!” said his rough companion. “We must
on!”

She says she does not need us. Past a doubt
Her parents have instructed her to wait.
And we have miles before us, and the hope
Of the kingdom on our shoulders!”

They rode on.

At the temple parapet the Princess Yin
Leaned sobbing, her bent black head within her arms.
Too sudden and too fierce that dreadful news.
She could not grasp it. Only, through all her limbs,
An utter lassitude of purpose shivered,
And she forgot both time and place and peril.
Her father, her dear father, her brave father!

Then through her grief another face and name
Began to thrust. She overheard again
The words her father hissed to a councillor
Departing from his palace: “Yes! Vauchéfou . .
The dastard! . . Instant message—for the King!”



THE GREAT WHITE WALL

She well remembered how his rising power
Was bruited round the kingdom; she remembered—
A hot blush stained her cheeks—how he had met
And grasped her in that orchard, once, and how
Her father's scimitar as suddenly gleamed
Between the trees. He stared hard at that Lord,
Ordered her to the park,—and, scurrying off,
She heard high voices. It was little later
That he was banished.

As she thought, her eyes
Wandered across the plains. . .

No! Was it true?

It was not true,—those must be Chinese horsemen
Came on so fast!

She saw the silver water
Flash in the sun under their plunging mounts.
Pell-mell, breakneck, galloping on they came
By bridge or paddy or any likely way.
And how they rode—and what a forest of spears
And swords they brandished! . . . *No, it was not true!*

She pressed her hands to her eyes, and looked again;
Then, all at once, was horribly afraid.

As if a vise of ice had gripped her limbs
She stood and stared. Now some were near enough—
Just splashing out of the rice to gain the road
Below there—for her eyes to note their dress,
Their barbarous appointments, the strange large horses
They sat, their wild formation, the rude crude armor

[47]



THE GREAT WHITE WALL

They wore so carelessly. The leading squadron
Dashed up the first stretch and were hidden by a turn.
A great brown dog (as it seemed) came bounding with
them.

"Sacred ancestors! Where to fly?" She ran
Round to the temple door. The road climbed steep
Beyond the temple, steep and straight away.
They would surely see her. Oh, if she had not strayed
This morning! But her mother's stony eyes,
She thought, had driven her mad . . her mother had
seen

Too many wars . . *She was wandering again . .*
And there . . !

Inside the dusky temple she whisked
Kicking her pattens far across the paving.

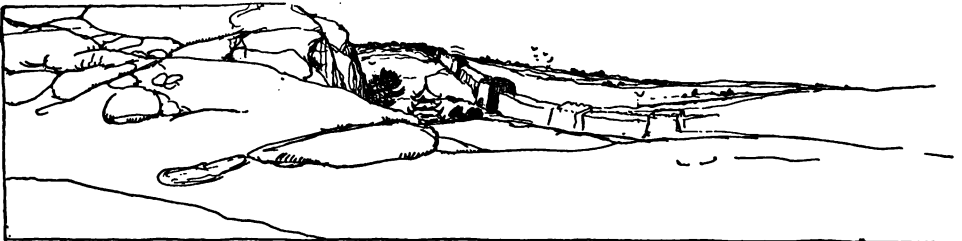
The first quick horse-hoofs sounded on the road.

Fearfully, like a ghost, she fittted her way
Behind a pillar of the deserted house
Of the Tao priests—and was lost in distant shadow.

But scarcely was she hidden when a blacker
Great shadow fell from the doorway.

In they swarmed
Cursing and laughing, clanking and clattering weapons,
Laying immediate hands on the holy altar
And haling from it sacred vessel and relic;

[48]



THE GREAT WHITE WALL

Hacking the images, roughly playing horse,
Screeching and roaring, hurling a bloody head,
One bore at his belt, about the ranks for a ball,
Bellowing. . .

And then she saw the Chief,
Timur himself (though this she could not know),
Standing apart, brooding, biting his lip—
A fresh cut from a Chinese scimitar
Bloody across his cheek, his dress awry,
His felt boots splashed with mire, his purple hair
And long mustachios tangled.

Yes, and then
She caught a glimpse of that large tawny dog
Slinking here and there among the roisterers.

But when the lion's great mournful visage looked
Around the pillar, she was not afraid.
It had come noiselessly on velvet pads
And stood regarding her. But in its eyes
There was something pitiful, and very brave,
And nothing cruel.

So the slender girl
And the great beast stood at gaze a moment's space.

Then, craftily, the lion turned its eyes
To scan the staggering barbarians
Splashing holy wine on the altar steps;
With what seemed one long supple movement, now
It slunk to a half-hidden little door
Behind the girl, and pushed and nuzzled it

[49]



THE GREAT WHITE WALL

Whining softly, faintly.

She fitted like a glint
Of light—both beast and girl were through the door
That closed, upon the instant, noiselessly.

But the dark Chief, with a hunger at his heart
Gnawing like tigers' teeth, his rolling eyes
Turning this way and that in baffled search
For the ghost of a phantom of a secret vision,
Had seen.

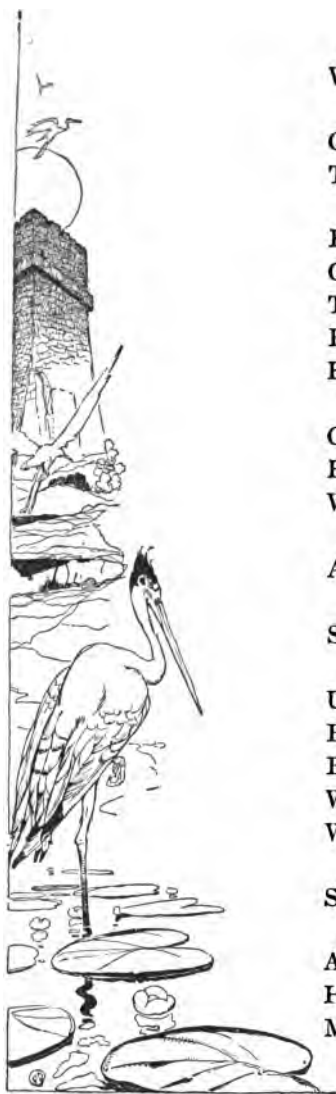
He cast an eye upon his men
Obviously shouting and careering.
He strolled between the pillars carelessly
With the thick blood throbbing thunderous in his
temples,
And he too found the door.

He kicked it wide
Suddenly with his foot.

The girl sat crouched
Upon the cliffward parapet, her head
Buried in the lion's mane whose muzzle upthrust
Beneath her. The small jutting balcony
Was hung like a swallow's nest against the wall
With no way down.

Like a flash the lion turned
Snarling; but Timur's eyes were not on him.

As the girl, bewildered, raised her weeping face
He knew her, and all his blood sang through his body
Molten and mad. *Here was his long desire!*



THE GREAT WHITE WALL

He crossed his arms; and yet his arms stretched out
Beyond his will. But the girl's deathly face
Read all the ogreish black enormity
Of her country's ruin and her father's death
In lines of fire upon that countenance.
Tottering she raised herself; with awful eyes
She stared upon him. Her bosom rose and fell.
The lion stood large and terrible between them.

Then, clenching hands, without a single sound
Outward she sprang. Against the reeling sky
She fluttered the veriest instant, and was gone.

With a cry—but as he moved the lion rose
Horribly roaring at Timur. He started back.
The door behind him filled with faces devilish
And daunted.

For a moment the issue swung,
Until, while hands shot forth to stay his arm,
The Chief—all Tartar now—tugged out the blade
Of his flashing scimitar. His whistling breath
Labored his breast. In true demoniac rage
He raised the sword.

And then the lion spoke.

"Timur!" it said. *"Timur! Timur!"* it said.

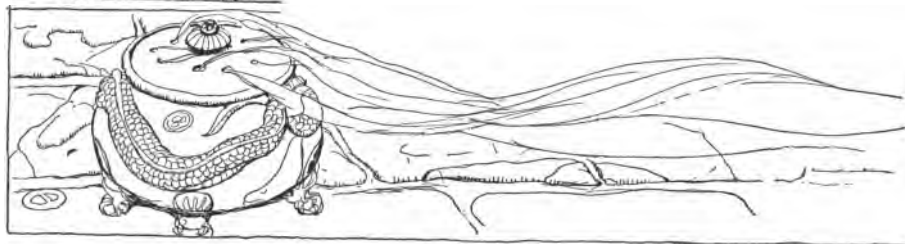
The strange voice from the throat of that great beast
Standing with bulging tendons, its black mane

[51]





“Horribly Roaring”



THE GREAT WHITE WALL

Bristling erect, its yellow eyes slits of wrath,
Clutched at the necks of the barbarians.

Terribly again

"Timur!" it said. "Timur! Timur!" it said.

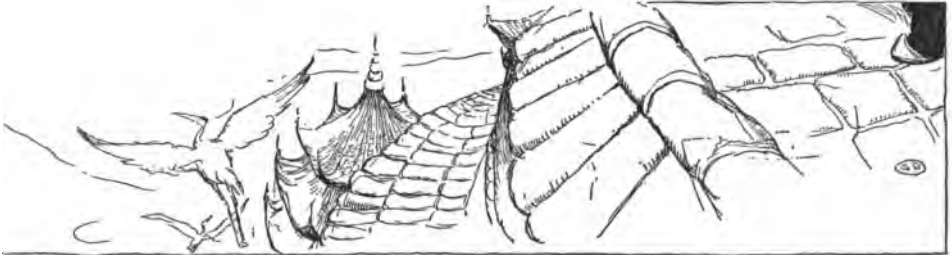
*"The lion dies. My soul will leave its prison.
My one good deed was fruitless—but that God,
In whose reins is infinite compassion, knows
My intent, and gives my weary soul release!"*

And, as the silence grew, and the great lion
Began to sway before them on shuffling feet,
"Timur," it said, "O Conqueror, the world
Is ever a wall within a wall; the world
Is a golden vessel filled with scorpions
And serpents! Are our destinies predicted,
Written upon our foreheads? But the Wall,
The wall within, the wall you cannot take . . . ?"

Slowly the filmed eyes closed. The lion sank
In death before them.

And then, as if a smoke
Blurred everything, they were suddenly aware
Of a great form appearing on the sky
Above the parapet, in splendid robes
Jewelled and girdled, and glorious regalia. . .
And Timur knew great Kublai's eyes upon
His eyes. The two stood giving gaze for gaze
Till the shape faded.

[53]



THE GREAT WHITE WALL

Still staring, the sight of all
Pierced through the air—saw, past the plains, The
Wall.

Even as they watched, a flame-reddened smoke went up
On the nearest tower,—their signal of victory!



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